Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, CA 94549

Bulletin, Vol IX No. 2 - 6 *March, 1981 - MARCH 1982*
President: Ted Craig *Newsletter Editor; Lucy Wait*

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT February 23, 1981

Dear Members:

I think that you can tell from this newsletter that local history is very much a part of Lafayette.

Your society is active in promoting an appreciation of Lafayette's interesting past and alert to events that are of local interest.

In order to continue the good work of our beloved archivist, Fern Powell Davis, we are in need of someone to assume the responsibilities of that position. We need an individual to lead a small group that monitors and adds to the LHS's extensive collection of photographs, articles and oral histories at the Lafayette Library.

If you would find this interesting, please give me a call at 283-3342.

I am looking forward to seeing you at our General Meeting, Tuesday, March 17. Be sure to reserve Tuesday, May 12, for our Annual Spring Potluck.

Theodore W. Craig
President

NEXT GENERAL MEETING - MARCH 17, 1981

LAFAYETTE SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - 8 P.M.

Reserve this night for an interesting, informative lecture given by Dough Kari, a realtor with Fox and Carskadon. Mr. Kari will discuss the history of Reliez Valley. He has lived in the area most of his life and is currently writing a book on its history.

Mr. Kari has researched the many land manipulations and dealings which made some people rich by simply selling the same parcel many times without recording the sale once. The farming and land use will also be discussed.

IN REMEMBRANCE

FERN POWELL DAVIS
1899-1981

Fern Powell Davis, the Historical Society's First Lady, died Jan. 5, 1981. In an interview in 1976, she said, "I first saw Lafayette in about 1920 and little did I realize then that Lafayette would mean anything to me the rest of my life, or that I would ever live there."

A graduate of Mills College and Stanford, Mrs. Davis first taught school in the tiny community of Bieber in Lassen County. Years later she came to Contra Costa Co. and taught English in Martinez. Then she became supervisor of school libraries in Pittsburg. "It was simply a marvelous way to end one's teaching career," she said.

Upon retirement, she was free to serve on the board of Mt. Diablo Mills Club and the Lafayette Library Association. In 1967, Mrs. Davis said, "Circumstances came up about some historical materials in town, whereby it seemed necessary for us to organize a committee. This committee became the Lafayette Historical Society in 1971."

The Reverand William N. Abaloe, an old friend and fellow historian, delivered the eulogy at services on Jan. 9 at Oakmont Memorial Park in Lafayette. He spoke with love and affection of her many accomplishments telling how she served from 1971 on the Society's Board of Directors and as an Archivist was responsible for setting up the files now housed in the Lafayette Library. These files hold more than 1,000 old and rare photographs as well as documents that trace the community's beginnings. Fern Davis was largely responsible for the research and the wording on the plaques which now mark the old Pioneer Store, Geils Building, Way Side Inn, Third School House, and more recently the Town Hall and Lafayette Cemetery.

In 1976, "La Fayette -- A Pictorial History," was dedicated to Mrs. Davis, an honor which she considered one of the highlights of her life. She also received the prestigious Lafayette Citizen Of The Year Award in 1978.

In Fern Davis' own words, "I would like to be remembered for contributions that I have made for preserving Lafayette's past." Toward that wish, the Lafayette Society's Board of Directors voted to establish a Fern Powell Davis Memorial Landmarks Fund. All contributions, which are tax deductible, may be mailed in care of:

Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, 94549

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GRACE W. STANLEY
1892-1981

Grace W. Stanley died the last week of January in Walnut Creek. Mrs. Stanley had been a resident of Lafayette for 55 years; during that time she was an outstanding member of our community. She belonged to the Lafayette Historical Society, to the Lafayette Women's Club and to the American Legion Auxiliary of Lafayette. Her involvement with, and her extensive contribution to the Lafayette Schools began in the 1940s, when she served as member and president of the Lafayette Elementary School's PTA, and member of the Acalanes High School Parents Club.

Mrs. Stanley was born in Boston, Mass. in 1892; the daughter of the late Captain and Mrs. James Eagles, a pioneer family of Lafayette. She lived several years in Nova Scotia until she moved to Lafayette in 1926.

Mrs. Stanley's husband, M. H. Stanley, who died in 1972, was a founding trustee of the Acalanes Union High School District and also a trustee of the Lafayette School District. M. H. Stanley Intermediate School is named after him, as is the Stanley Building in downtown Lafayette.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Stanley have left us a legacy of true community spirit and dedication to our city. The Lafayette Historical Society is among the charity and non profit organizations suggested by the family for contributions in Mrs. Stanley's name.

OLD BETSY - CITY'S FIRE ENGINE SEEKS A HOME

Brad Rovanpera of the Lafayette Sun has written a detailed story of the past, present and the hopeful future of Old Betsy; the City's fire engine. We are delighted to reproduce his article for the information of the Society's members; we hope to get your suggestions and your help for this project which, if realized, would give our City another charming and tangible statement of its past for the enjoyment of all:

"The future may be brighter for Old Betsy, if the Lafayette Historical Society has any success.

"Lafayette's first fire engine, vintage 1919, has spent the last three years of its longtime retirement staying dry - and virtually a recluse - in a string of private garages - waiting for the chance to lead another city parade or bask in all its crimson glory at a Concours d'Elegance.

"But the biggest problem facing the venerable Model T Ford is the same as when it was purchased for the City of Lafayette in 1977 for $3,500: 'Where do you put it?'

"'We're looking for a permanent location,' responds George Wasson, former mayor and Lafayette Historical Society member. 'It would be nice, of course, to have it in the middle of the Plaza park, but there's really no room. For example, the Veteran's Memorial Building would be a good site.'

Old Betsy (Continued)

"The Society is exploring the possibility of putting Betsy on permanent display at the Veteran's Building, located at First Street and Mt. Diablo Boulevard. The plan, Wasson says, would be to erect a display booth modeled after a miniature fire station so Old Betsy could be on permanent display at one of the most visible locations in the City.

"Wasson and co-enthusiast Hubbard Anderson have joined others in donating their time and skills to the gradual restoration of the perky little fire engine, which was the first used by the fledgling Lafayette Fire District in 1920.

"After the engine was retired in the mid-Thirties, it changed hands several times - in the 1950s by the Lafayette Jacees and sold to John Penn of Lafayette in 1960. Penn restored the old girl and sold her to Pleasant Hill junk collector Earl Sanko, who left the fire engine to gather dirt and cobwebs in a barn until Lafayette resident Tony Lagiss rediscovered it in April 1977 and sparked a community campaign to buy Betsy back.

"It was a close shave, as a Montana collector was prepared to pay $4,500 for the engine. But Sanko agreed to sell it to anyone in Lafayette for $3,500 and in a few months, the funds were raised (with a generous $1,770 contribution from the Society.)

"The City agreed to take title to the engine, and in the ensuing years it has been stored at various private garages throughout the City as Wasson, Anderson, Percy Whitten, Mike Roberts, Norman Tuttle Sr., several senior citizens and Jaycees donated their time to get Betsy back into presentable - and operating condition.

"But the Society is going to need about $3,500 to restore Betsy to display, and it only has about $900 in its treasury.

"'We have one-fourth of what we need,' Wasson says. 'We have four or five people who have volunteered their skills (to renovate). We would like to have it restored so it can be used - we don't want to make it some kind of thing that can never be touched at all.'

"'What we'd like to do is get the exterior restored, so people will be a little prideful.'

"Several obstacles stand in Betsy's way before she can have a permanent home. but Wasson hopes residents and the city council will show an interest in the project.

"Persons wishing to make contributions toward the renovation and permanent display of Old Betsy may write to the Lafayette Historical Society, Box 133, Lafayette 94549.

THE WAY SIDE INN

Following our philosophy to preserve and to restore historical buildings in order to keep their historical character; we have been in close contact with Mrs. Jacobson of the Assistance League of Contra Costa County who runs the Way Side Inn Thrift Shop at 3521 Golden Gate Way, Lafayette.

A fire destroyed the back of the shop and Mrs. Jacobson is attempting to insure that its external repairs and restoration are done in a manner compatible with the historical character of the building.

A COLLECTION OF ARTIFACTS FOR THE LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We would like to hear from members or friends concerning any suggestions you may have in finding a home for a sizable collection of artifacts of historical interest that the society may have the opportunity to acquire in the near future. It would be necessary to have a volunteer force that could restore these objects which may be used for educational and display purposes and to tell the story of the rural past of Lafayette.

For detailed information on this subject, call:

Ray Peters
1324 Martino Road, Lafayette
Telephone: 283-5256

LOCAL CHURCH MARKS ITS 125TH ANNIVERSARY

Almost as old as the town it serves, the Lafayette Community Methodist Church celebrated its 125th anniversary recently. The Church was established in 1855 when pioneer citizens gathered at Elam Brown's home for Sunday services. The first church was built in the 1850's on Golden Gate Way, with Brown, Nathaniel Jones, Benjamin Shreve and Milo Hough active in its establishment. Peter Thompson, the village blacksmith, was Sunday School Superintendent and services were conducted by laymen and visiting ministers until 1868 when Rev. Richard Klinick became the first pastor.

In 1885 the old church building was moved to land donated by Brown near the corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Oakland Street. A few years later the congregation moved again, this time to the Good Templars Hall on the hill at the east side of Plaza Park. Until 1927 the "Church on the Hill", as it was known locally, played an important part in community life.

In that year, the pioneer church was sold, and the third school on Moraga Road was purchased and remodeled for use as a sancturary.

A SEARCH FOR THE CONTRA COSTA GAZETTE

Thomas F. Gates, History Librarian of the County Library has written asking our cooperation to find the issues of the Contra Costa Gazette from September 1858 through April 1860.

A Search - (continued)

He suggests that we search 'old attics, basements and collections of historical material stored away' to locate and donate these issues of the Gazette to our -

County Library
1750 Oak Park Blvd.
Pleasant Hill, California 94523

BOOKS OF INTEREST TO OUR MEMBERS

The second impression of "LA FAYETTE - A PICTORIAL HISTORY", published by your Society can be bought at the Needlepoint Shop on Lafayette Circle - where you can also find stationary and post-cards with historical themes. It can also be found at the Lafayette Grill and Bar on Mt. Diablo Boulevard, at the Lafayette Camera Shop, at the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, the Lafayette Bookstore, and at the Orchard Nursery. It can be ordered by mail from:

Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, California 94549

The book continues to sell successfully at $6.00 a copy; this benefits our Society and allows us to pursue our goals. We have requests from people who want to send the book to their friends who used to live in Lafayette; we also have increasing requests for the book from outside our City. All in all the book continues to be on demand for most any occasion calling for a reliable source of information about our immediate community, or for a lovely informative and reasonably priced gift.

Dorothy Gittinger Mutnick has published her own book of local history called: "SOME CALIFORNIA POPPIES AND EVEN SOME MOMMIES" - Volume One, 380 pages. Volume Two will be published this summer. Despite its whimsical title, the book is a serious account of the people who came earlier to California and of those who settled Lafayette.

In twenty years of patient research, consisting mainly of reading old legal documents, letters and the Contra Costa Gazette, she gathered the facts related to the first discoverers of the State, the establishment of the presidios, the distribution of local land grants and the years of settlement of Lafayette up to 1880.

Mrs. Mutnick says that rather than leave anything out she has 'probably found as much as it is possible to find'.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS, the story of California's first capital city, can be ordered from Benecia Heritage Book, Inc., c/o Bank of America, Box 37, Benecia, CA. 94510, for $17.50 per copy plus tax. Written by historian Richard Dillon, the book is illustrated with more than 75 black and white and color photographs. Proceeds benefit the Benecia Historical Museum.

Books (continued)

The story of the OLD BORGES RANCH, written by Marlene White, published by Dean Lesher and illustrated by local artist Robin Moore, contains some interesting stories about pioneer families in Walnut Creek, especially the Borges Family. This booklet may be ordered for $3.00 (tax included) plus 54¢ postage first class, or 40¢ postage third class, from Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation, 1035 Castlerock Rd. Walnut Creek, 94598.

St. Mary's Continuing Education Department offers six courses in Local California History that include Old Town San Francisco, the Peripheral Canal Delta Country, the Mother Lode, Sonoma County, and Contra Costa County. For more information, call 37604411, ext. 492.

WALK THROUGH LAFAYETTE

In a charming and informative article which appeared in the Contra Costa Times' 'Time Out' Magazine of February 13, 1981, Jo Ann Garlington teaches the reader how to walk through Lafayette and locate its historical sites and other points of interest.

She mentions the fact that the Lafayette Historical Society gives guided tours of our City; she also writes about her visit to our extensive archives in the Lafayette Library where she found Elam Brown's "Paul Revere" lantern. She ends her article by suggesting that if one wishes to learn more about the City, one should acquire "La Fayette - A Pictorial History" which second edition is now available in several local shops.

DUES

We wish to thank the members who have already made their contribution for this year.

Dues for 1981 should be paid any time before our annual meeting in May.

Kindly send your check to our Membership Chairman:

Virginia Anderson
3483 Monroe
Lafayette
Telephone: 283-3632

WELCOME!

We are delighted to welcome the following new members in our Society:

Ruth Lewis
Ruth Marcus
William and Anne Chilcote
Bob and Mary Lou Van Galder (former members)

We are ready for their suggestions and ideas in whatever aspect of our organization in which they have a special interest, and can help us grow and diversify our efforts concerning our City.

RELIVE A DELTA QUEEN RIVER BOAT TRIP OF 50 YEARS AGO!

The Orinda Historical Society has graciously invited us to join them in their big river boat trip of the famous old run from San Francisco to Sacramento thru the historic Delta country, route of the 49ers to the gold fields.

There will be a background narrative in the three deck boat, describing the many points of interest enroute; and enough time to explore Old Town Sacramento with dining at a colorful eatery such as D. O. Mills. After dinner we will return home via chartered bus.

The price for all transportation - boat ride and bus fare round trip is $28.00 per person, a very real bargain.

Please return the reservation slip below before March 15.

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Return to:

Del Loper, Program Chairperson
Orinda Historical Society
28 Sleepy Hollow Lane
Orinda, California 94563

We are planning to join the Orinda Historical Society's Delta River Boat field trip leaving 9:00 a.m., April 11, San Francisco to Old Sacramento and return by bus after dinner.

Please reserve _____ tickets

Name _____

Address _____

IT'S TIME FOR DUES

COMPLETE - TEAR OFF - MAIL WITH DUES

NAME _____
First Last Spouse

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ DATE _____

Classification: (Circle one)	Student	Family	Business	Life
	$2.50	$5.00	$50.00	$100

SPECIAL INTERESTS: PLEASE CHECK IF YOU CAN HELP

____ Historic Preservation
____ Landmarks
____ Community Observer
____ Oral History
____ Typing
____ Other (describe)

_____
_____
_____
_____

____ Field Trips
____ Photographs
____ Research
____ Newspaper Clippings
____ Phoning

Name, Address & Phone Number of friends interested in joining:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Comments:

Mail to: LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, California, 94549

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P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, Ca. 94549

First Class Mail